**Healing Streams in the Desert 31st January 2021**

**Revd. Huw Davies introduces Trevor Grant of The Leprosy Mission**

Huw: Trevor, it’s really nice to have you come back to Sandy and to see you again. We’re doing a new project for this year. Last year we were working in Africa as well, in Nigeria. We were doing a project with limbs and prosthetics and wheelchairs. This next year is going to another troubled spot in Africa, a country called Mozambique. Tell me a little bit about Mozambique, I don’t know much about it, it doesn’t hit the news all that much.

Trevor: Mozambique is on the east coast of southern Africa. It’s quite a large country. It’s got a population of around 29,000,000, but we’re looking mainly at the just the very northern territory, which is about the size of Scotland, which we can at least picture in our minds the size of that. It’s a very poor country in many respects: the United Nations has Development Index, and it’s 181 out of 189 so it’s virtually at the bottom of that index. So much of that is because their ability to read and write is very poor. Over half of the adults cannot read or write, so that impacts on education, on communication and people’s understanding of things, so that is a big thing to get over.

It’s quite a rapidly growing population as well, again about 50% or they are under the age of 15. Typical income is less than £1.50 a day, so it does really have a poor feeling to it. They have a number of natural disasters, cyclones, this sort of thing. The majority of the people are going to be effectively self-sufficient farmers, in other words whatever they grow is what they eat. If they can’t grow, if they have natural disasters and problems with that, they do not eat, so they need to understand more efficient ways to grow their food as well. If they can do that, maybe they’ve got some spare and they can take that to market and then just perhaps get a little bit of surplus to act as savings, a little bit behind them, which would be great to help them to survive.

H: I know at the end of our little conversation we’re going to watch a film and see a little more about the project, but in a nutshell, one of the things that we’ll be doing is raising funds to build little community hubs so that people can gather together in a safe place and listen to some trainers and teachers to learn how to do health, how to help with leprosy and overcome stigma but also to help the farmers to make their subsistence farms work better in order to survive the famines and the vagaries of the weather. This sounds like a really worthy thing.

T: Yes, it really is; looking at everything that affects them, so not just going in and spotting cases of leprosy, which in the first place is the priority. Clearly we do need to do that and we’ve got health workers there and they travel around the country to identify cases and produce the healing for that. But it’s more than that, it’s a much more holistic approach, to train them to look after themselves, to produce sufficient food and to just look at this whole wider aspect of being community. The stigma, because of this lack of education, it’s a worrying thing. So at the moment people are fearful of the disease leprosy; part of the education is for them to understand that it’s just another disease that is curable and to put back those questions of stigma, one, for the people that actually suffer but also for the whole of that village so that they can learn not to put the stigma on people within the village that do have leprosy so it goes both ways.|It’s a whole community approach.

H: For the first three months of this year our government are going to add to whatever I give you, they are going to match the funds so your little handout that has been given to people on the back of the emails talks about what our money can buy. You have put there a bicycle for £100 that can take the trainers to different places. If I give you £50 the government will pay the other £50 I guess.

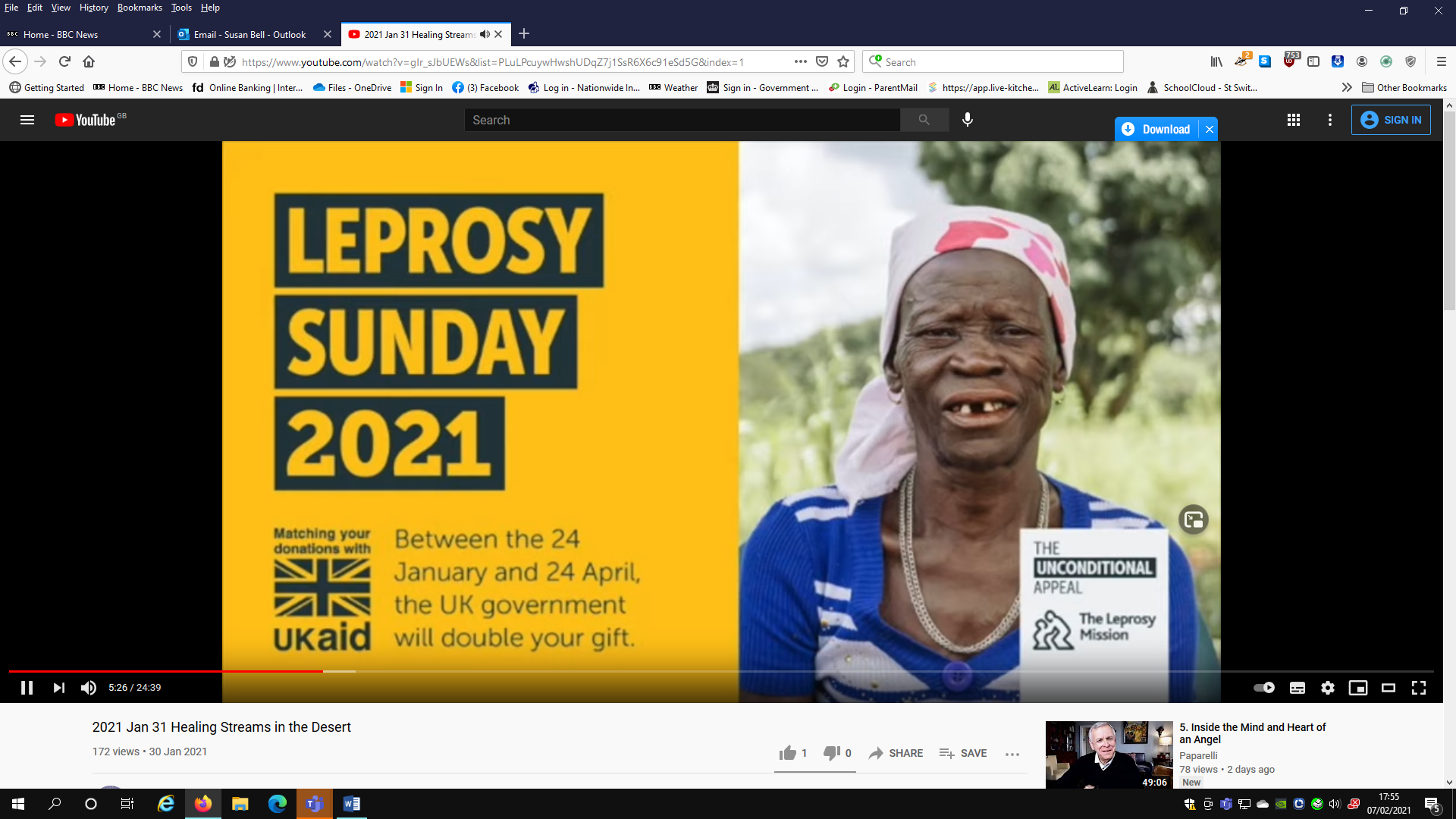
T: Absolutely!

H: And if I give you £100 you can buy two bikes?

T: Yes

H: It really is a BOGOF deal, isn’t it?

T: It’s too good an opportunity to miss!



H: Either it’s a 50% deal, or it’s a ‘buy one, get one free.’ And that goes towards a projector, or the easels that we buy or even the whole thing. For £3,000 we’d buy a whole hub and we’d get one free!

T: Yes! And that is the plan, to use the little window at the beginning of the year to raise funds to build and equip one hub but we’ll actually be able to build and equip two hubs. We’ve been fairly conservative because we recognise that it’s going to be another difficult year so we’re not wanting to stretch people but, for those that can, it is a great opportunity to use these next three months to be able to give and have that money doubled so double the benefit.

H: I’ve also asked if you would share something from the Bible with us that will encourage us and help us as Christians. The situation that we’re living in isn’t easy right now. Some of us are finding it mentally quite challenging, and relationally, and with our finances, work, our schooling for the children, so what does the Bible have to say that would encourage us? I think you’re going to bring something out of the Book of Ezekiel… nice and obscure, well done!

I’ll leave you to it and I look forward to what you have to share with us. Thank you ever so much for joining us today, Trevor.

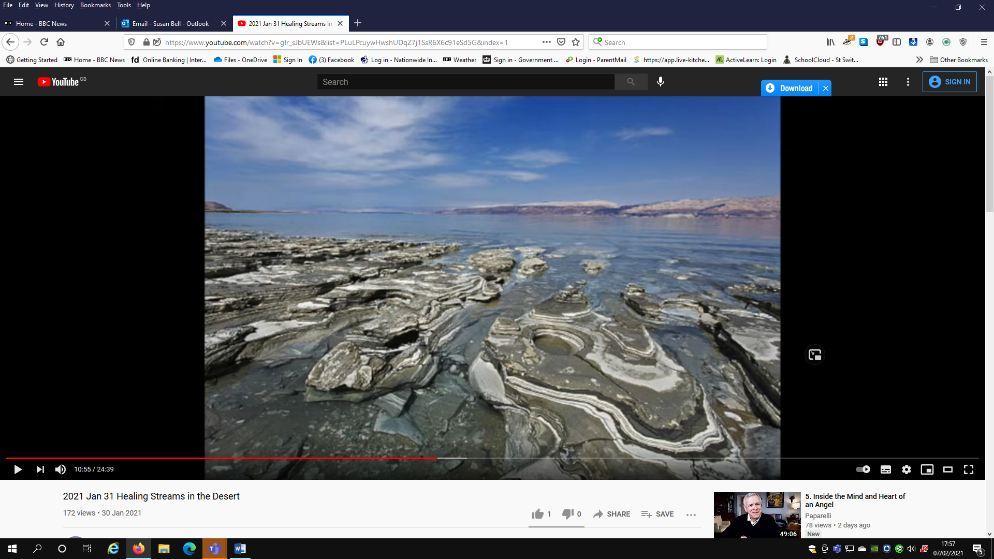
T: Thank you, Huw. Well yes, you’re absolutely right, we’re going to look at the Book of Ezekiel and it’s not the most common sermon on leprosy I appreciate. We’re looking at Chapter 47, which you’ve already heard though those first 12 verses of Ezekiel and I wonder what you were even thinking and feeling as those verses were being read to you. We’re right at the beginning of the 6th century BC and the global superpower at this time is Babylon. It’s King Nebuchadnezzar, who probably most of us have heard of before was in charge and he was laying siege to Jerusalem and ultimately he takes away 10,000 people into exile. And one of these exiles was a man in his mid-twenties called Ezekiel. God specifically called Ezekiel as a prophet to these exiles that were sent over into Babylon.

The people of Judah, including Ezekiel, believed so much that their identity was bound up in God’s place in the Temple in Jerusalem. I think even now we’re aware of the politics, of the importance of Jerusalem. But this is how they felt, they felt God was present with them in the Temple in Jerusalem. So this is very, very symbolic, because of this some people felt that Jerusalem could never fall, that the Temple could never fall because God’s presence was right there with them.

But Ezekiel, he did have a greater understanding of God. He knew that the people of Judah were not sticking to their side of the agreement, to the covenant that God had made with them and that there would be consequences.

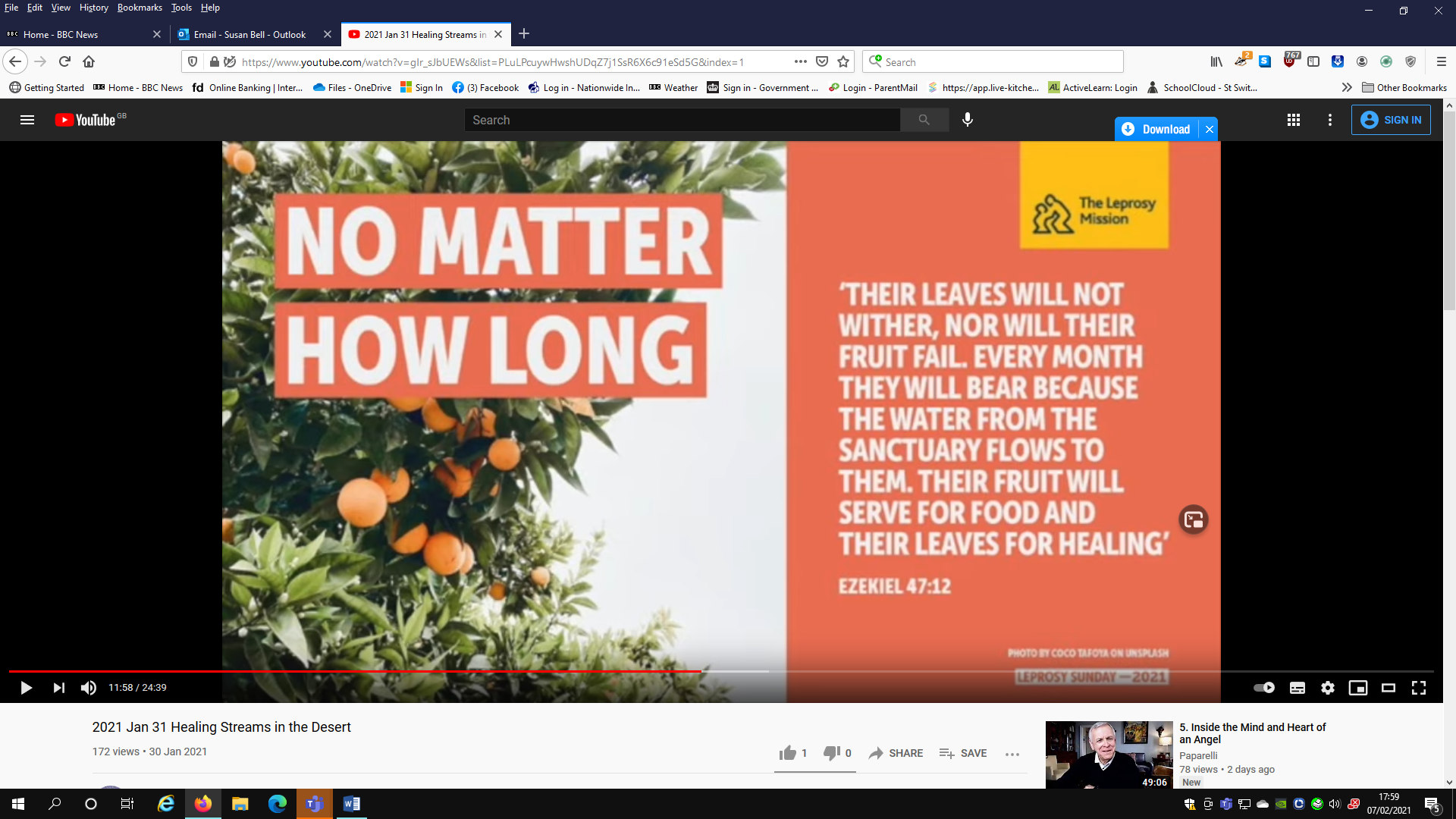
He prophesied that God’s presence would leave the Temple and that Jerusalem would be destroyed which is unbearable to think of but this did actually happen in 587 BC. 14 years later, after the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel receives this remarkable vision which we’ve just heard of the Temple in Jerusalem being restored. Now in this vision the glory of the Lord enters the Temple again. It’s a wonderful picture and symbol that the Lord will return to his people because he loves them so, so much. And Chapter 47 is a continuation of the vision which we’re going back to look at under three headings. Firstly, no matter how far, secondly, no matter how long and thirdly, no matter what.

So let’s look at this first point, no matter how far. Ezekiel had an amazing guided tour of the new Temple in Jerusalem. He sees water gushing out from inside the Temple and running down the steps. There’s a man there with a measuring stick and he’s measuring how deep that water is. Initially it is ankle deep to Ezekiel, and then it gets to knee-high, then waist-high, and before he knows it it’s just too deep to cross.



He’s led to the river bank and there he is told that the river will continue on into the Dead Sea. And there the water becomes fresh. Now, if anybody knows anything about the Dead Sea, nothing can live in it. Its salt concentration is eight and a half times greater than normal seawater, so no plants, no fish, nothing. In this vision Ezekiel sees fish in abundance in the sea. The sides of the river, there are trees growing, and amazing fruit trees growing there too. So this is a beautiful picture of the lengths to which God will go, no matter how far, to bring blessing, to life, to allow people to have life to the full and to show that he so loves them. It is particularly a reminder to God’s people in exile, that God will lead a remnant of them back into Jerusalem and only, and if only, they will abide by his Word, and by God’s promise to them and to put their trust in him.

Point number two is no matter how long. In Ezekiel’s vision, the visions of the trees, it’s the leaves on the trees that bring healing. To a people scarred by exile, this offers them great hope. God’s people didn’t know how long exile was going to last. Clearly it’s over many years, but they could look ahead then to the restoration that God has promised for them.



Now, during this last year for us, there has been a feeling that we have been in exile too. We’ve missed our friends, the love of our families, of many of the things that we would normally do. And let’s not fool ourselves, this has been a really tough time for everybody. You could say some more than others, but we’ve all had to struggle through this. Perhaps you’re also feeling that you’re waiting on the Lord for a long time to bring a certain healing to you personally. It might be a physical healing, it might be an emotional type of healing, but let this passage encourage you too, because however long our exile might feel like, we have the promise of God’s presence with us no matter what, no matter how long, no matter how far, he will be with us, he works though with us through these difficult times. And, as a follower of Jesus, he will protect and provide for us and we can enjoy his presence forever.

So I’m sure you know that leprosy need not exist today. It only exists because of the fear and ignorance and the lack of medical care for many people. And what kind of terrible exile do they suffer also, being rejected by their friends and their family and their community? There’s a real synergy, I feel, in this whole feeling of exile. But you can help change that, you can become a partner with us and be a ‘Changemaker’, as we call them in Mozambique, which we’ll hear a bit more about in a film shortly.

But let me cover my third point: no matter what. The Book of Ezekiel finishes on a triumphant note. It speaks of the exiles returning to Jerusalem. And the city being named ‘The Lord is there’. A remnant of the people of Judah did return to the city and the Temple of Jerusalem is rebuilt. Very interestingly, the Bible doesn’t speak of God’s glory filling the new Temple, but hundreds of years later God’s own son, Jesus, comes to earth as Emmanuel as we’ve celebrated at Christmas just last month. Jesus refers to himself as ‘the Temple’, announcing that he will be killed and be raised to life.

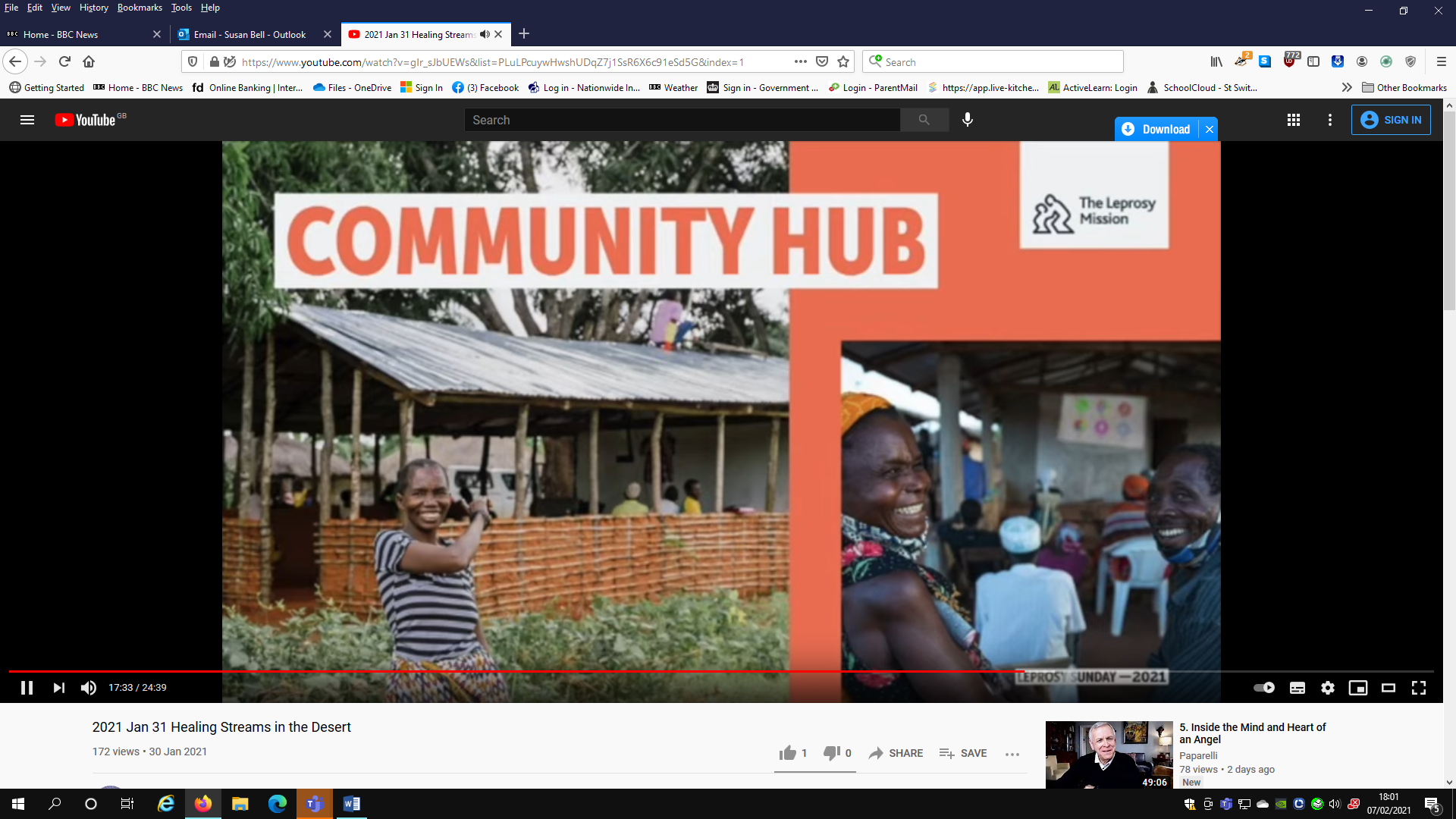
Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, for the things that we have done wrong, and that he has brought this unconditional love for us, to restore and to heal us with that new life that he promises us. So we can know God’s presence with us through his Holy Spirit right within us, wherever we go, whatever we do and we will be one with God forever in this new creation even when there is no need for a Temple made of bricks and mortar because the Lord is there with us.

So this powerful image of God’s Glory flowing out of the temple like a river, turning salt water fresh and bringing life wherever it touches reminds us that God will stop at nothing to bring healing and new life to his people because he loves us unconditionally.

So maybe you need to reach out today to accept that offer from God for his healing in your lives and we just have to ask him, it’s as simple as that.

So I would really love you to partner with us this year and with the rest of the people of Sandy to build these community hubs in Mozambique from which God’s healing and love can flow out to people throughout the whole village and to restore community as it should be.

A hub is going to be a safe place to meet people, to learn, to be educated, to be healed physically, and a place where those who can’t read or write can learn about leprosy through drama, through song and dance which is the traditional African, and certainly Mozambiquan way of communicating with people. It’s a place where heath workers can be trained to recognise those early signs of leprosy and to be able to give them healing very, very quickly. A place where lasting change can be, and God’s blessing can flow out to these rural communities.

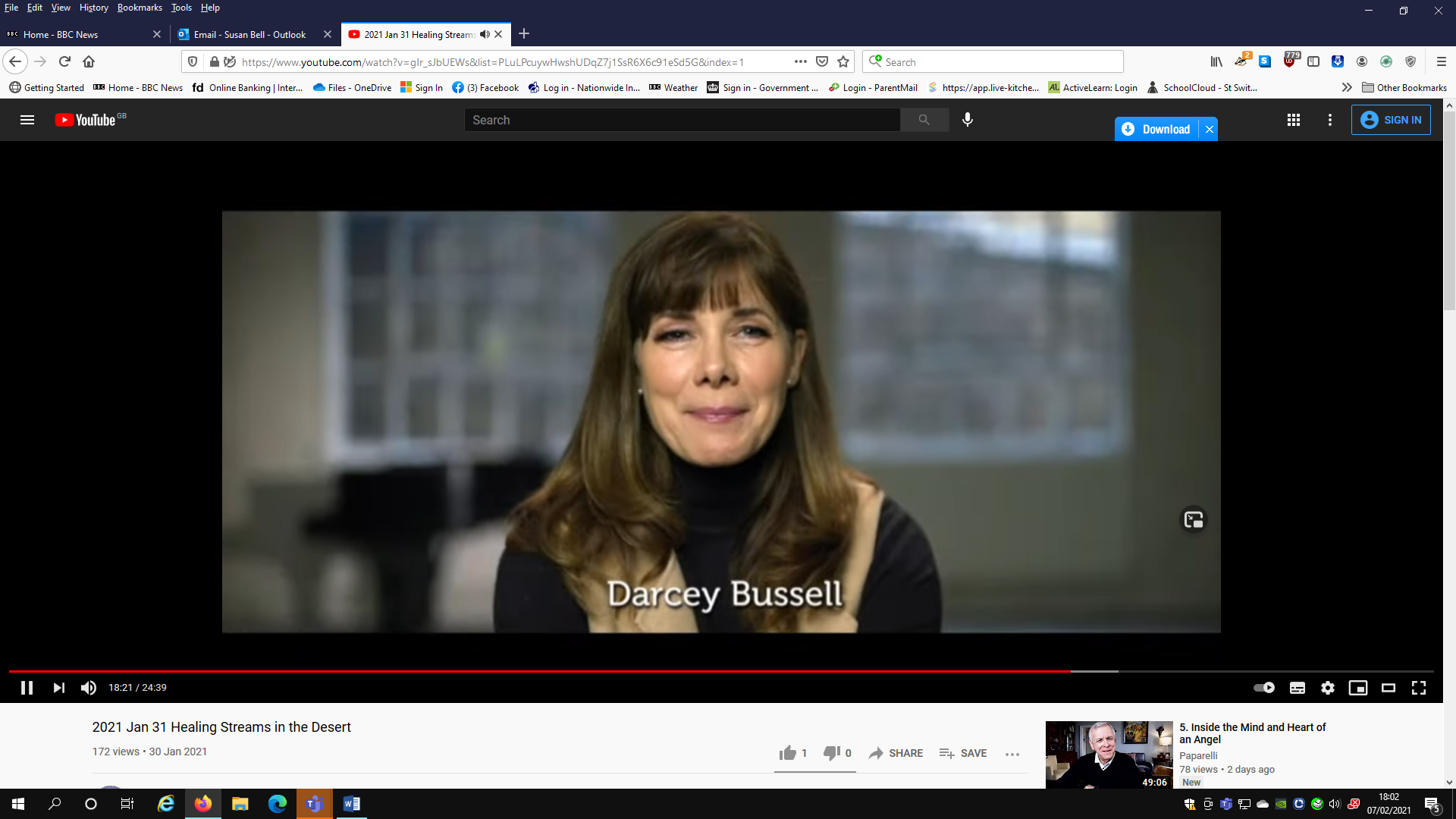


By helping to build a community hub today we are working towards the end of leprosy in Mozambique and discrimination of those people.

We’re going to watch a short film now where that famous dame, Darcey Bussell, who we know perhaps from ‘Strictly’ visited this country and learned about people affected with leprosy just recently.

Here a video was played:

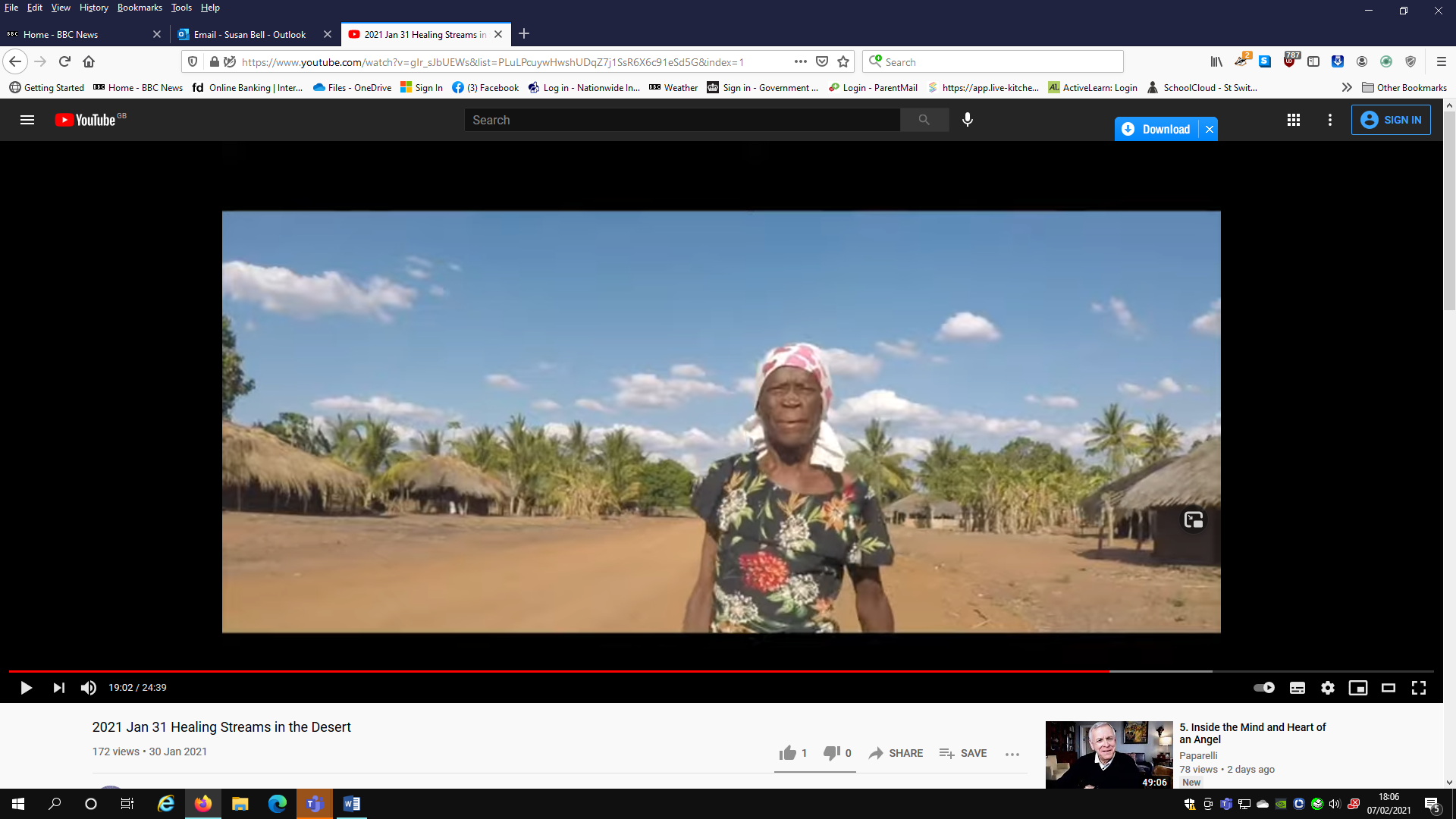
*Hello, I’m Darcey Bussell, and I’m proud to be supporting The Leprosy Mission’s Unconditional Appeal.*



*I first met people living with leprosy three years ago whilst on a trip with my family in Mozambique. It was shocking to discover so many cases of leprosy hidden away in remote rural areas. But I was struck by the love, grit and determination of those working to find and treat people affected by it. People like Zaina. She knows from personal experience just how devastating leprosy can be.*

*Zaina was a young mother when she first noticed discoloured patches on her skin. She didn’t know what they were, but when neighbours recognised the signs of leprosy they banished her to the forest and took away her three-year-old son. Thanks to the unconditional efforts of Leprosy Mission staff, Zaina was found, treated, and cured. Today she is a leader in her community, helping to find and welcome home other people affected by leprosy.*

[Grab your reader’s attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

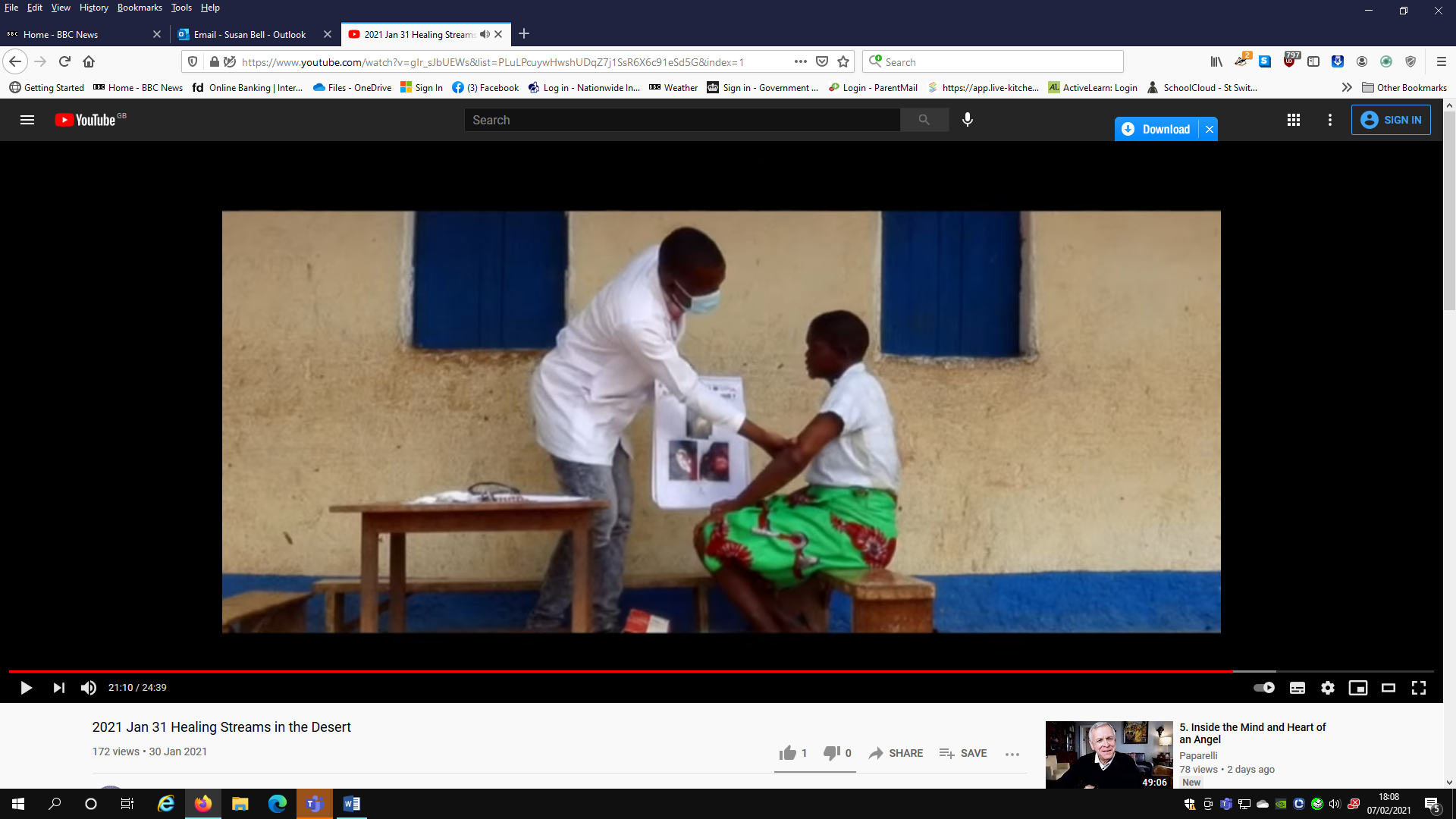


Zaina says: Anyone who needs help comes to me. And the people who once banished me now come and participate in our meetings. We are changing people’s attitudes. I am so happy. I wish I could take my heart out and show everyone how happy it is.

*Zaina is just one member of a large community of Leprosy Changemakers, made up of health workers, public speakers and volunteers, all determined to make leprosy a thing of the past. And you can join them and become a Leprosy Changemaker too by giving a gift to set this all in motion.*

*When you become a Leprosy Changemaker you’ll help find people affected by the disease no matter where they are and get them the urgent medical treatment they need.*

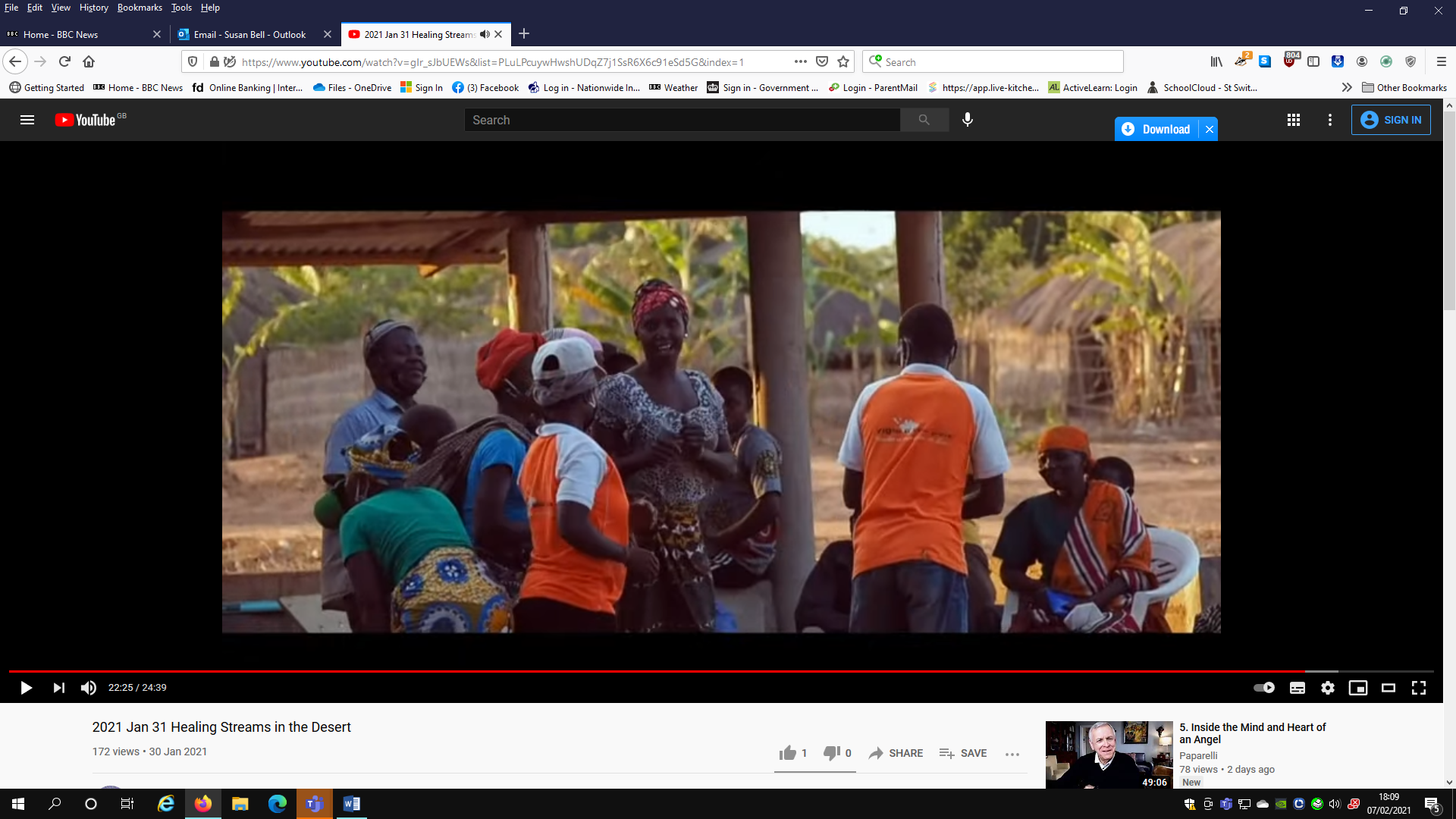
*In the far north of Mozambique, Gabriel, a health worker trained by The Leprosy Mission, has been on the road for three hours. He’s heard from local villagers about a young woman who is showing early signs of leprosy. If he finds someone with symptoms, he undertakes a thorough assessment, checking for patches, loss of feeling and inflamed nerves. People often worry about what will happen to them if leprosy is confirmed, so Gabriel is ready to offer help and advice.*



Gabriel says: Often when a patient first receives the diagnosis they feel frightened, dejected and need supporting. We have to prepare them because the treatment is long. We also talk to the community. We invite them to a place, a community hub, where we give lectures about leprosy and stigma to reassure people.

*The Leprosy Mission is helping communities to build hubs across Mozambique. These are places of hope where people affected by leprosy are welcomed unconditionally, a place where they can meet without fear of stigma or rejection and receive the care a treatment they need.*

*But a hub is much more than a place where leprosy is cured. It is the beating heart of village life, a safe space where everyone is welcome. Where health camps are help and where people learn about leprosy though song, dance and drama.*



*Please, will you help build more community hubs by giving a gift to the Unconditional Appeal?*

*And if you give before the 24th of April, your gift will be doubled by the UK government at no extra cost to you, meaning your gift will change twice as many people’s lives.*

*Please join our community of Leprosy Changemakers and make this disease a thing of the past in Mozambique.*

*Together, with your help, we will stop at nothing to prevent leprosy and end the disability and prejudice it causes. That is unconditional. Thank you.*

Voiceover: £24 (doubled to £48) finds and cures two people of leprosy

£162 doubled to 322 pays for a community health camp

£5,000 doubled to £10,000 builds a Hub of Hope

Trevor: Having seen what Darcey has shown us there, it is such a great opportunity to join with those people in Mozambique. And I would ask you to pray first, and consider how you can help, how maybe you’ve had a little bit of extra money that’s been spared during lockdown that you could give towards this work of God in Mozambique. To invest in God’s work of healing and restoration. Please be in touch with Colin Osborn to direct you in how easy it is to give and maybe be able to gift aid as well but thank you, thank you for the lives that you will heal and restore in the Name of Jesus in that unconditional love. Amen